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A Soviet agent?

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Soviet officials cut red tape fast for Lee Oswald

By JOHN KEPLINGER

(Third in a series)

Lee Havey Oswald, his Russian-born wife and child arrived in the United States in June, 1962, without fanfare.

Oswald's unheralded return home after an absence of more than 2½ years was accomplished with little difficulty — a fact that has since stimulated the curiosity of U.S. officials.

Where it has taken other Americans years of frustration to gain exit visas for loved ones in Russia, Oswald apparently experienced no such difficulty in achieving his wife's and daughter's freedom.

Perhaps the Russians just wanted to get rid of the young ex-Marine who defected to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1959, then claimed to have a change of heart.

MORE MEANING

Or, perhaps Oswald's hastily arranged departure, from behind the Iron Curtain had a more significant meaning.

Edward Ellis Smith of Palo Alto, a former Army, State Department and Central Intelligence Agency security-intelligence officer who lived in Moscow several years, is of the latter opinion.

Smith has carefully reviewed Oswald's movements from 1959 until Nov. 22, 1963, the day he allegedly murdered the President of the United States.

He believes the evidence strongly points to the likelihood Oswald was a trained Soviet agent, but one who acted on his own that tragic day in Dallas.

Oswald's wife, Marina, could speak little English on her arrival in the United States. She was born in Archangel, but apparently lived most of her life in Leningrad.

According to Smith, she and Oswald met in Minsk early in 1961. They began seeing each other regularly and in a few weeks were married.

Marina was no ordinary Russian peasant girl, Smith says. She was well educated, had a degree in pharmacy and was a Latin and French scholar.

Smith speculates the couple met at a Young Communist club or under some other unusual circumstances. The circumstances must have been unusual, he believes, as Oswald was supposedly only a poor sheet metal worker and she an educated Russian girl possibly related to a colonel in the Soviet intelligence service.

Soviet society is organized along caste and class lines, Smith explains. High-ranking officers in particular are very clannish. Thus, he interprets Oswald's courtship of Marina to mean the American defector was moving in circles considerably above the station of an alleged sheet metal worker.

"The very fact he was allowed to meet this girl even once; demonstrates he was a very special guest of the Kremlin," Smith says.

Their marriage indicates "Oswald was moving in official circles . . . that he was on good terms with Soviet authorities . . . that he was not any 80-ruble nobody . . ." according to Smith.

They were married April 30, 1961, and by that time, Smith recalls, Oswald already had indicated his desire to return home. He finds it difficult to believe the Russians would sanction the marriage under such circumstances, unless, of course, everything had been arranged.

SUBSTANDARD

If the explanation were simpler . . . if Oswald had merely been a defector found too unstable or unpalatable for Soviet citizenship, who was thinking of returning home, then, by Soviet norms, he would have been considered "substandard . . . the scum of the earth," Smith says.

It is more logical to assume Marina was assigned to Oswald as his companion, he states. "The most revealing piece of evidence," Smith contends, "is also the most incontrovertible — the Soviet exit visa given Marina and her child."

"Soviet authorities have, true enough, on occasion allowed Soviet wives of foreigners to leave Russia. In practically every case, however, the husband was a diplomat or a foreign correspondent."

"And in every case it took a great deal of doing to obtain the exit visa, including in many instances well-timed intercessions by ambassadors, ministers and even heads of state."

CONDITIONS

"Exit visas usually have been granted only when the Kremlin felt the need to demonstrate willingness to coexist peacefully," he adds. As for Oswald's plans to return to the United States, Smith argues, "There was no reason — absolutely none

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CPYRGHT

On May 24, 1962, Oswald's passport, still in the American Embassy in Moscow where he left it in 1959, was renewed and Marina and their child were entered into it. They left Russia a week later.

"This exceptional speed," Smith says, "would not have occurred had the Soviet authorities just made a sort of off-hand decision to the effect: 'Oh, well, Oswald is no good, let him go, good riddance. His wife should not have married him, but let her go, too.'"

"Soviet decisions are not made in this manner. Since the exit visa was issued within one week, this can only mean the Kremlin wanted Marina to accompany Oswald."

"It was their decision — and no other — that she go!"

CONTROL

Smith reasons Marina may have been sent along with Oswald to "keep him under some sort of control, assuring knowledge of his whereabouts, or to provide him with an assistant."

He observes also that since she left relatives behind, the customary Soviet hostage arrangement was apparent.

"Whether Marina herself was indoctrinated and assigned a specific mission is of course conjectural," Smith adds. "Her inability to speak English (if true) might suggest her training was incomplete or that Soviet intelligence planned to use her in an 'innocent status.'"

"After her arrival in the U.S., she might well have become resentful of Soviet intelligence authorities, who were using her in an intelligence operation, wedding her to a person who fell far short of the ideal husband, and burdening her with two children in a completely alien atmosphere."

"Or, she may be play-acting," he further speculates. "So far, she seems to have divulged much less information than any Soviet citizen perforce possesses."

By the end of June, the Oswalds were in the United States. There were only 17 months remaining in the life of President John F. Kennedy.

(Next: Oswald's mission)

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